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Contemporary World Issues

**Network Neutrality**

*Should Internet users be in control of what content they view and what applications they use on the Internet?*

Network neutrality should be promoted as people have the freedom to control whatever they see and use on the Internet and the providers should be allowed to show anything they want. Destroying network neutrality would greatly limit the user’s research for information over the Internet, which would not only frustrate the users but also cause many problems, thus making the issue on network neutrality even more complicated and controversial than the present. The issue contains the information from two sides: the pros and cons. While the pros state that the all users of the Internet should equally have the liberty to do whatever they want to online, the cons counter that people should pay to see what they want, in which the payers get the better service.

This issue is controversial because the Internet usage around the world is increasing, with many companies, groups and individuals turning their heads toward online contact and meetings rather than off-line. Examples include online libraries, stores and messengers that are being created as Internet technology advances. Some of those technological advances include better connection and more information. It is network neutrality that has allowed the Internet to develop so much in roughly 20 years. But the important part is that broadband carriers are using their market power to discriminate against competing applications or content. They are even trying to get Congress’s permission to determine what content gets to us. By destroying network neutrality, the use of Internet could drop dramatically and advancement in Internet technology could slow down if not stop at all.

Network neutrality is defined by the action in which all network traffic should be treated without discrimination for everyone, including traffic in Internet Service Provider’s (ISP) such as phones or cable industries. The problem in network neutrality issued from the power that the ISP’s could block a certain application or limit the freedom of the Internet user. The problem that needs to be solved is that the ISP’s and mobile communication enterprises such as the Internet should put some kind of basis on the use of the Internet so the users can use the Internet regardless of who the provider is and what contents the application provides. ISP’s and other communication providers should not be allowed to partially block or limit services such as Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services and allowed some sites to be used more smoothly than other sites.

The problem in network neutrality isn’t entirely new. After the Foreign Funds Control (FFC) regulated that using the Internet was an information service rather than a communication service in 2005, the rules applied to communication companies stopped applying on internet companies and therefore the issue arose. The American National Assembly promoted network neutrality because it feared Internet polarization. Examples of those problems include broadband companies giving a priority within online traffic to content business that pay more to the companies.

The cons first argument states that for smooth and high quality services, it is necessary for the users to pay the broadband companies according to the rank in which people use the certain network service. Communication service companies such as AT&T, Verizon Communications Inc, BellSouth, etc argued that ‘consumers should be given the option’. For example, users of VoIP services such as Skype or Vonage should be given the choice between the two services depending on the quality- and the users should pay more to use the better service. Using applications and data services that take up a lot of memory have negative impacts on the Internet connection and the consumers would not want to have connection problems because of other users- and could pay more for the priority use of the Internet application.

Their second argument states that some consumers have the intention to pay more for better service, and that the communication companies and ISP’s can use the income to invest in improvement of infra connection and increasing the bandwidth. Their supporting statement also says that on the other hand, the content and service industries could invest in increasing the quality of applications.

Their last opinion states that it isn’t only the communication and cable companies but also free market supporters that are against the ‘pointless and unproductive’ network neutrality proposal. They predicted that the Internet’s future isn’t controlled by laws and rules but free market mechanism. They supported it with the foresight that through the prohibition of making the users pay to use applications, the expansion and advancement in the Internet would decline and also bring about problems in the lack of memory and the true identity condition. The cons last statement claimed that there would be less Internet industries and ‘consumers choice’ because of the absence in motives in advancing the Internet.

The pros start with the fact that if network neutrality were not guaranteed, VoIP and video services could blockade competing services and thus caused inequality on the network, debilitating the expansion in Internet industries. It is supported by the prediction that new enterprises, compared to those of former large enterprise, would not have sufficient funds to form enough bandwidths, restraining the growth in new enterprises and limiting technology innovation. Vint Cerf, nicknamed the ‘father of the internet’ and Google’s vice-president, once said, “The Internet's open, neutral architecture has proven to be an enormous engine for market innovation, economic growth, social discourse, and the free flow of ideas. Allowing broadband carriers to control what people see and do online would fundamentally undermine the principles that have made the Internet such a success.”

The pros second argument generalize that the principle of network neutrality is that the internet was opened for cultural activity, technological advancement and freedom in expression, and that through the freedom companies too enjoyed economic profit. If network neutrality were destroyed, enterprises that don’t pay additional fees could be blocked intentionally and that the political view could force some sites can be blocked from being connected.

Ultimately, cooperating and paying enterprises/people would be provided fast internet connection while the common people would be provided slow internet connection, creating classes within the Internet society. Because of this problem, small companies would find it hard to innovate through the Internet. Companies that already pay more to use extra services such as finance companies would need to pay even more. On top of these problems, there are possibilities that the communication services and ISP’s can consult the prices together. Political and citizen groups, unions, and other groups can be blocked from internet connection because they have different inclinations; people who don’t have enough money to pay to pass on their thoughts and opinions would also have a hard time. Michele Combs, director of communications at the Christian Coalition, said, "We're worried that the Internet is about to be divided into two tracks, the fast track and the slow track, and that groups that can't afford it will be stuck on the slow track." She also noted that the Christian Coalition is a grass-roots organization with chapters in every state. Those chapters do not have a great deal of money, and Combs said she fears they won't be able to pay for higher bandwidth, "and consumers won't end up going to our sites.

Network neutrality should be supported. If it weren’t kept, large communication companies and internet content enterprise paying premium prices will get traffic preference and the polarization of the Internet is most likely to not only occur but get faster. Through this the communication companies could use their trumping market power to prevent new competitors from forming and sorting the Internet contents into priority rankings, which is unfair to internet sites. Overall, as a big Internet user myself, I wouldn’t like to pay more than now. Network neutrality isn’t much of a problem in Korea, in which the services are some of the best around the world, but as I am set to go to the United States of America for college, this is a considerably big issue. Nowadays, lots of research is done on the internet and I would hate to pay an extra dollar for every site I use for research. Network neutrality should be encouraged by everybody- including the broadband companies themselves. We all should have equal access to the Internet and broadband companies should not discriminate against competing applications or content. In fact, this kind of discrimination should be made illegal by law- because it exists in all sorts of companies that control anything related to broadband. Examples include the most common telephone corporations and here, broadband companies. Network neutrality will help us in that like always, Internet technology will keep advancing- and as offline applications come on online, more people will be able to access a larger amount of information. Denying these rights by making the users pay, or the applications do deals with the broadband companies would cause uproar within the online community.